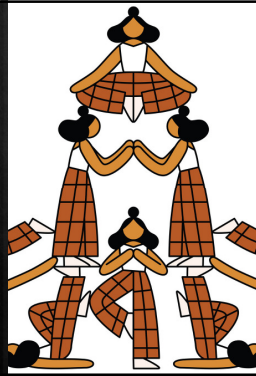


## Trauma Informed Defense Teams

Megan Leschak, LMSW  
Forensic Social Worker and Mitigation Specialist  
Context Mitigation



1

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Mindful Moment



2

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Trauma

A serious injury or shock to the body,  
as from violence or an accident.

An emotional wound that creates  
substantial, lasting damage to  
psychological development.

An event or situation that causes great  
distress and disruption.



3

---

---

---

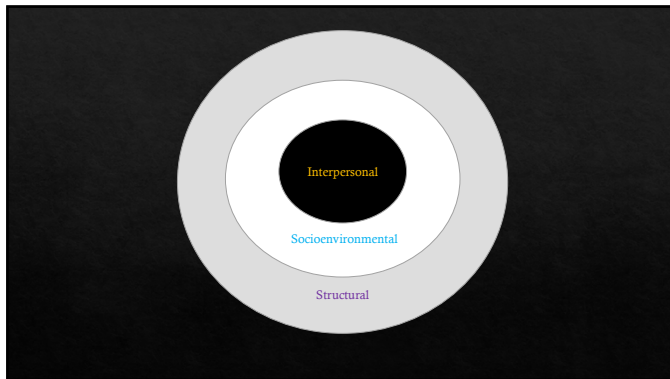
---

---

---

---

---



4

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Study**

Kaiser Permanente  
1995 to 1997

17,000 members in Southern California receiving physical exams completed confidential surveys

5

---

---

---

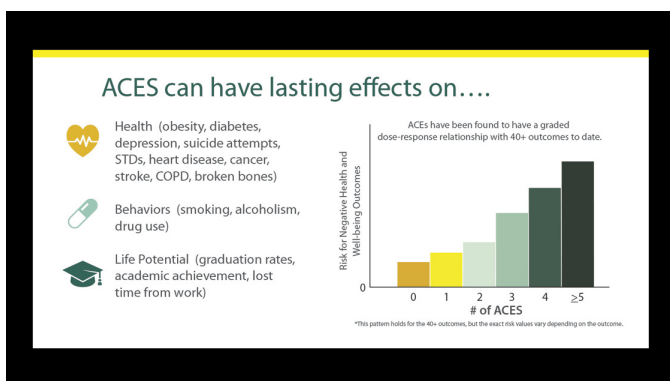
---

---

---

---

---



6

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## ACEs Limitations



- \* Only household trauma
- \* No exploration of institutional or socioenvironmental trauma
- \* Conducted with predominately white, upper-middle class insured patients

7

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Socially Engineered Trauma



- ◆ Exposure to toxins
- ◆ Lack of resources
- ◆ Exploitation
- ◆ Substandard living and educational settings
- ◆ Witness to violence and substance abuse
- ◆ Institutional oppression
- ◆ Structural racism
- ◆ Gaslighting

8

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Racialized Trauma



"The answer to why so many of us have difficulties is because our ancestors spent centuries here under unrelenting brutal conditions. Generation after generation, our bodies stored trauma and intense survival energy and passed these on to our children and grandchildren."

*Resmaa Menakem, My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies.*

9

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Intergenerational**  
traumatization

Exposure leads to changes in phenotype in children

**Multigenerational**  
traumatization

Exposure leads to changes in phenotype in children and grandchildren

**Transgenerational**  
traumatization

Exposure leads to changes in phenotype in children, grandchildren, and subsequent generations to exposure to maternal trauma

**GOVERNMENT VIOLENCE AND STRUCTURAL OPPRESSION**  
Historical Trauma and Epigenetics

10

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

**Common Symptoms**

- ◆ Nightmares
- ◆ Anxiety
- ◆ Phobias
- ◆ Depression
- ◆ Emotional numbness
- ◆ Substance abuse (self-medicating)
- ◆ Somatization
- ◆ Intrusive thoughts and flashbacks
- ◆ Hypervigilance
- ◆ Hyper/hypoarousal
- ◆ Dissociation
- ◆ Avoiding all reminders of trauma
- ◆ Sense of foreshortened future

11

---

---

---

---

---

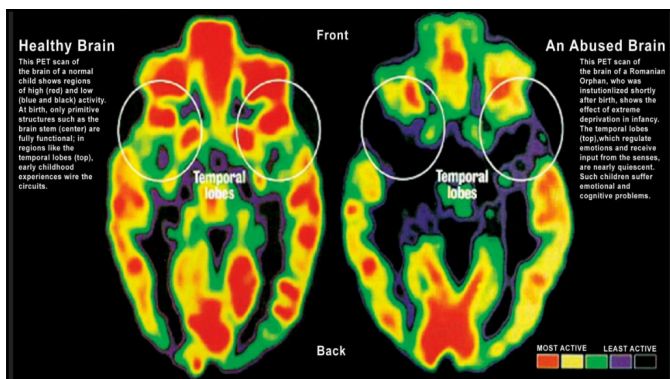
---

---

---

---

---



12

---

---

---

---

---


---

---

---

---

---



**Narrative Therapy: Storytelling as Healing**

Narrative therapy is a style of therapy that helps people become - and embrace being - an expert in their own lives. There is an emphasis on the stories we develop and carry with us through our lives. As we experience events and interactions, we give meaning to those experiences and they, in turn, influence how we see ourselves and our world.

13

---

---

---

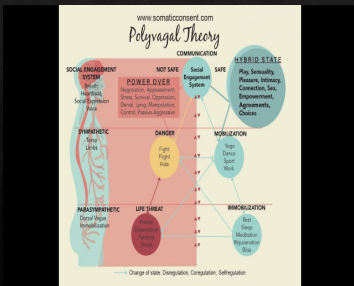
---

---

---

---

---



**Polyvagal Theory**

*The Polyvagal Theory provided us with a more sophisticated understanding of the biology of safety and danger, one based on the subtle interplay between the visceral experiences of our own bodies and the voices and faces of the people around us. It explains why a kind face, or a soothing tone of voice can dramatically alter the way we feel.*

Bessel van der Kolk

14

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Trauma Informed Five Principles**


**Safety:** Ensuring as much physical and emotional safety as possible considering institutional setting.

**Transparency and Trustworthiness:** Explain what you are doing and why ~ roadmap.

**Choice:** Providing options and autonomy as much as possible.

**Collaboration and Mutuality:** We will work as a team.

**Empowerment:** Take every opportunity to acknowledge resilience ~ trauma growth!



15

---

---

---

---

---

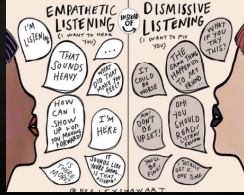
---

---

---

## Preparing for an Interview or Meeting

- ◆ How are you emotionally, physically, and spiritually?
- ◆ Are you able to be fully present?
- ◆ Do you have time limitations?
- ◆ What do you want to get out of the meeting?
- ◆ Are your expectations reasonable?
- ◆ How will you modify, if necessary?



16

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Questions

1. Were you physically abused as a child?

Trauma Informed:

- \* How were you punished as a child?
- \* What types of things did you get punished for?

2. Is your family dysfunctional?

Trauma Informed:

- \* When you were upset as a child, what would you do?
- \* Describe a typical weekday night in your home at age 6, 10, and/or 16.
- \* A typical Saturday?

17

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Questions

3. I know your neighborhood ~ people call it the Beirut of the south!

Trauma Informed:

- \* How would you describe your neighborhood?
- \* Talk me through a walk to the corner store/park/friend's house. What did you see, hear, and smell along the way?
- \* Tell me about your early experiences with law enforcement.

4. Were you a good or bad student?

Trauma Informed:

- \* Did you feel safe at school?
- \* When you had questions with your homework, who did you go to for help?
- \* Can you name a particular class or teacher you enjoyed? Why?

18

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Grounding Techniques

- ◆ Hands in water
- ◆ Move body: walk, stretch, or jump
- ◆ Draw an outline of your feet on the floor in your mind
- ◆ Breathing exercises: box method
- ◆ Recite something: song or poem
- ◆ Use math or numbers
- ◆ Imagine leaving painful feelings behind - packed up in a box while you walk or bike away
- ◆ Art/coloring book

5 - things you can see  
 4 - things you can feel  
 3 - things you can hear  
 2 - things you can smell  
 1 - thing you can taste

19

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## The Four Pivots

Reimagining Justice,  
 Reimagining Ourselves

SHAWN A. GINWRIGHT, PhD

## Heal Thyself

Mirror and Lens Work  
 Transformational, not Transactional

20

---

---

---

---

---

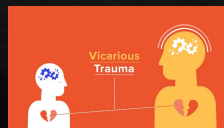
---

---

---

## Secondary Experiences

- ◆ Compassion Fatigue
- ◆ Vicarious Trauma
- ◆ Burnout
- ◆ Moral Injury



21

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## How Does This Show Up For Legal Professionals?

- ◆ Substance use and abuse (self-medication)
- ◆ Addictive, self-soothing behavior including sex, shopping, gambling, and self harm
- ◆ Relationship challenges
- ◆ Myopic thinking
- ◆ Inability to cope with stress "on edge" at all times
- ◆ Gallows humor
- ◆ Isolation
- ◆ Restricted sense of self

22

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Trauma Informed Legal Teams

Wellness and self-care  
are not just about  
individual actions.  
They can be created  
and supported by  
institutions.



23

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Self Care Culture

- ◆ Demystify the superhero
- ◆ Regular check-ins and supervision
- ◆ Flexible schedules
- ◆ Training
- ◆ Boundaries around availability including after-hours emails, texts, and calls



Caring for myself is not  
self-indulgence, it is  
self-preservation, and that is an act  
of political warfare.

— Audre Lorde —

AL QUOTES

24

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## Regrouping

- ◆ Food and water
- ◆ Grounding items
- ◆ Take the long way home
- ◆ Plan time to debrief
- ◆ Closing ritual
- ◆ Care plan: Exercise, music, dinner with friends or family



25

---

---

---

---

---

---

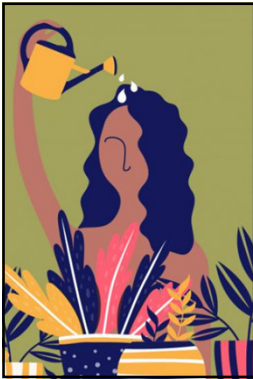
---

---

## Healing

"In today's America we tend to think of healing as something binary: either we're broken or healed from the brokenness. But that's not how healing operates, and it's almost never how human growth works. More often, healing and growth take place on a continuum, with innumerable points between utter brokenness and total health."

*Resmaa Menakem, My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies.*



26

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Contact



Megan Leschak, LMSW  
Forensic Social Worker and Mitigation Specialist  
Context Mitigation  
<https://www.contextmitigation.com/>  
828-775-1734 - cell  
[meganleschak@contextmitigation.com](mailto:meganleschak@contextmitigation.com)

27

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---